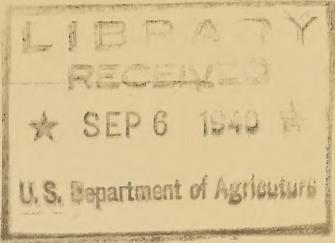


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
" Bureau of Agricultural Economics



COOPERATION IN RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON AN INTERSTATE
AND REGIONAL BASIS

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Introduction

- (A) Cooperative research on an interstate or regional basis presumably implies the joining of hands of institutions or agencies in two or more States in the conduct of research on problems common to these States. I can conceive of the following arrangements by which this can be accomplished:
- (1) Research institutions or agencies located in two or more States may decide to work on the same basic problem, each studying a sample area; or
 - (2) Each may accept a division of labor on a broad or basic project and make some one segment of analysis;
 - (3) The Federal government or a foundation may stimulate or even sponsor a regional project in which two or more States cooperate;
 - (4) It might be possible for some regional council or other overhead regional organization to sponsor and promote regional projects by obtaining the cooperation of two or more States.
- (B) My purpose in this outline is to review the character of rural sociological research of the past, to cite instances in which interstate or regional approaches have been or are being used, and to present some additional suggestions for research in this field.

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The Evolution of Rural Social Research

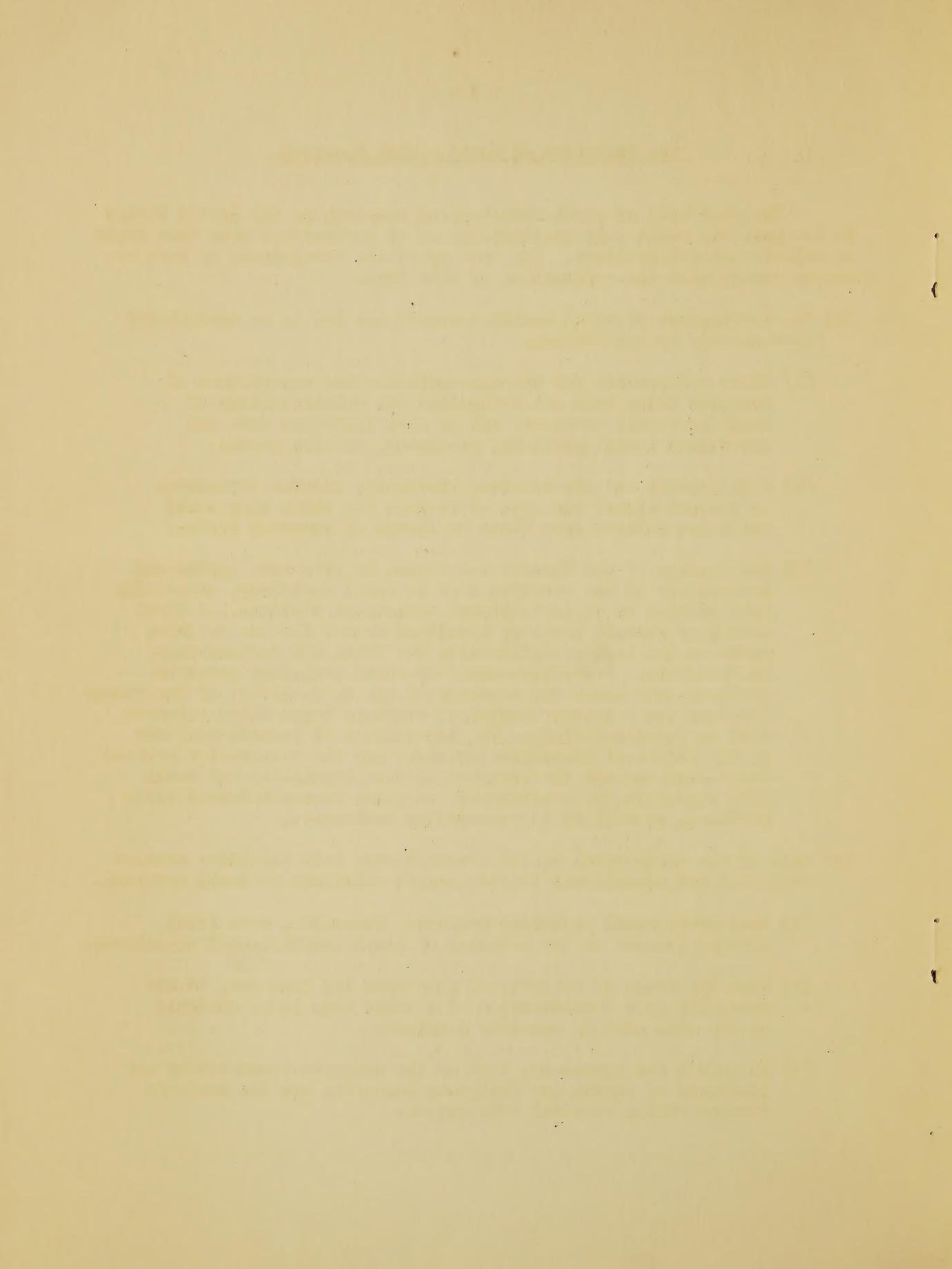
The vast bulk of rural sociological research in the United States in the past has dealt only incidentally or by implication with what might be called regional problems. The history of the development of such research contributes the explanation of this fact.

(A) The development of rural social research has had to be conditioned tremendously by opportunism.

- (1) Those responsible for the appropriation and expenditure of research funds have not recognized the practicability of studying social problems, and in many instances have not envisioned social problems, processes, or situations.
- (2) Sociologists for two decades, therefore, allowed themselves to conduct almost any type of project for which they could get a few dollars from those in charge of research funds.
- (3) The passage of the Purnell Act tended to give some system and homogeneity to the research work in rural sociology, especially that carried on at agricultural experiment stations. A Rural Sociology Purnell Advisory Committee worked for two or three years on the task of delineating the field and systematizing the projects. A greater number of rural sociology research projects came under the scrutiny of the U. S. Office of Experiment Stations and a greater number of stations began doing research work in rural sociology. The supervision of Purnell projects by the Office of Experiment Stations and the cooperation between State stations and the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life therefore did considerable to guide research toward basic problems, as well as to systematize techniques.

(B) Much of the early rural social research came into existence because religious and educational leaders sought solutions to local problems.

- (1) Many early rural sociology projects, therefore, were local surveys focused on the problems of local institutional situations.
- (2) When the scope of projects of this type was expanded, it was generally to a consideration of a wider than local analysis of the same sort of specific problems.
- (3) In only a few instances, such as the projects conducted by the Institute of Social and Religious Research, was the analysis focused with a regional orientation.

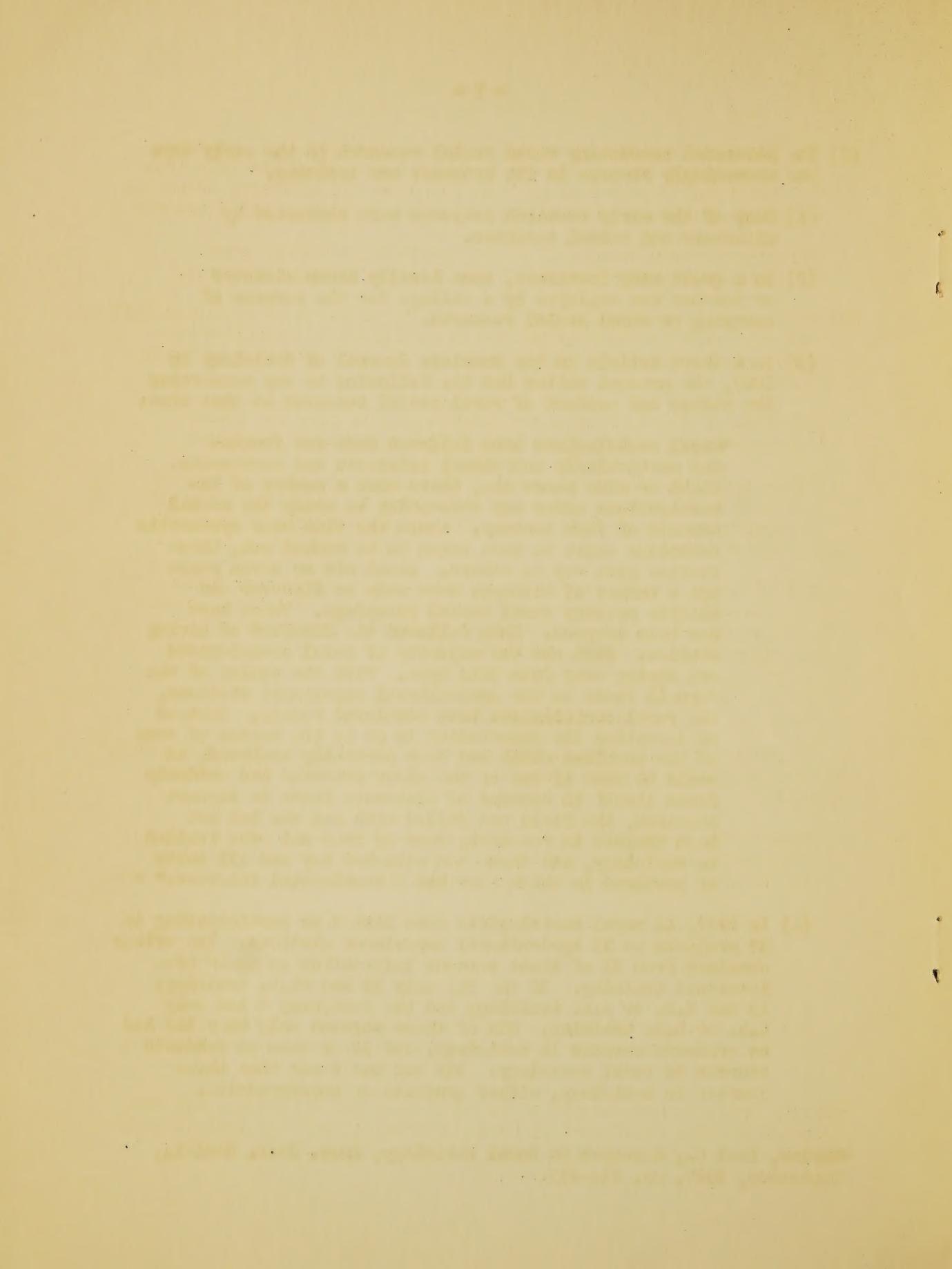


- (c) The personnel conducting rural social research in the early days was exceedingly diverse in its interest and training.
- (1) Many of the early research projects were conducted by ministers and school teachers.
 - (2) In a great many instances, some locally known minister or teacher was employed by a college for the purpose of carrying on rural social research.
 - (3) In a short article in the American Journal of Sociology in 1927, the present writer had the following to say concerning the status and conduct of rural social research at that time:

"Rural sociologists have followed fads and fancies and particularly individual interests and sentiments. Eight or nine years ago, there were a number of investigations under way attempting to study the social aspects of farm tenancy. About the time some systematic technique ought to have begun to be worked out, these studies gave way to others. About six or seven years ago a number of attempts were made to discover and analyze primary rural social groupings. These have now been dropped. Then followed the Standard of Living Studies. Just now the majority of rural sociologists are shying away from this type. With the coming of the Purnell funds to the agricultural experiment stations, the rural sociologists have scattered widely. Instead of accepting the opportunity to go to the bottom of some of the problems which had been partially analyzed, as would be done if one of the older sciences had suddenly found itself in command of elaborate funds to support research, the field was filled with men who had not been trained in research, some of them not even trained in sociology, and these men attacked any and all sorts of problems in which they had a sentimental interest." *

- (4) In 1927, 44 rural sociologists were listed as participating in 38 projects at 25 agricultural experiment stations. The writer obtained from 31 of these persons information on their professional training. Of the 31, only 12 had Ph.D. training; 13 had M.S. or M.A. training; and the remaining 6 had only A.B. or B.S. training. Six of these persons said they had had no graduate courses in sociology, and 18 of them no graduate courses in rural sociology. Six had had fewer than three courses in sociology, either graduate or undergraduate.

*Taylor, Carl C., Research in Rural Sociology, Amer. Jour. Sociol., September, 1927, pp. 214-215.



Three of them had never had a course in sociology. Eighteen of them had had no courses in statistics. They had come into the field of rural social research from the ministry, extension work, general sociology, agricultural economics, and farming.*

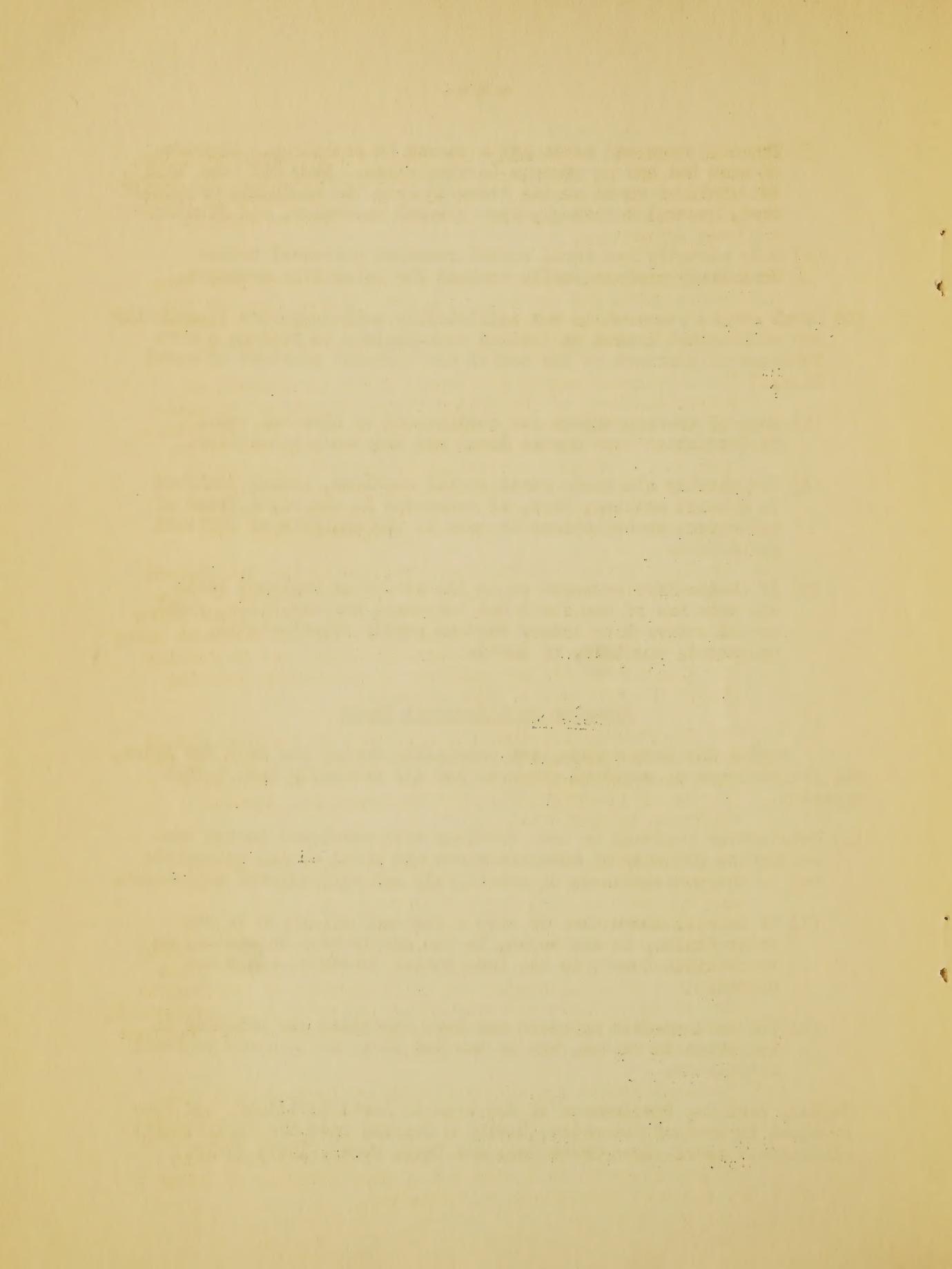
- (5) Only recently has rural social research personnel become dominantly professionally trained for scientific research.
- (D) Rural social research is now sufficiently well-supported financially and well enough manned by trained sociologists to presage a more fundamental approach to the social and cultural problems of rural life.
 - (1) Most of these problems are conditioned by time and space factors which lead beyond local and temporary situations.
 - (2) Practically all basic rural social problems, though analyzed in a local setting, have, if conceived in the right frame of reference, contributions to make to the analysis of regional situations.
 - (3) If cooperative research on an interstate or regional basis can make use of the funds and personnel now available, rural social research no longer need be purely opportunistic, ephemeral, sporadic, or local.

Research on a Regional Basis

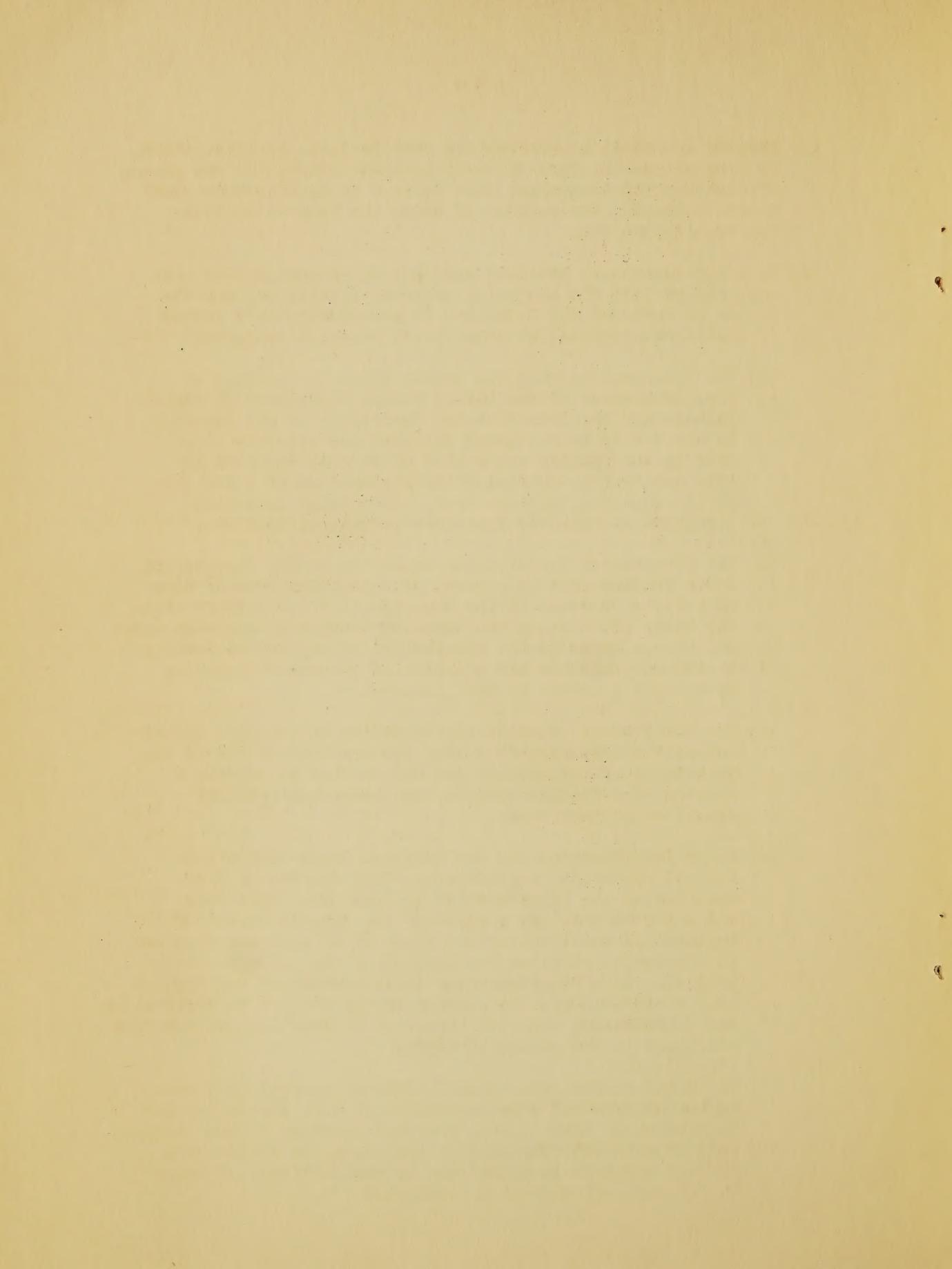
During the last decade, and especially during the last few years, the fruitfulness of regional research and its necessity have become apparent.

- (A) Outstanding regional or area problems have developed in the consciousness not only of administrators and rural social scientists but in the consciousness of practically all agricultural scientists.
 - (1) It is well known that we have a regional situation in the Great Plains, in the South, in the Appalachian Mountains, on the Pacific Coast, in the Lake States Cut-Over, and other places.
 - (2) The problem-area approach may have dominated our thinking to too great an extent, but it has led us to see generic regional situations.

*Taylor, Carl C., Development of Research in Rural Sociology, and Some Problems in Need of Attention, Having a Bearing upon the Agricultural Situation. Assoc. Land-Grant Col. and Univ. Proc., 1927; 17-18.



- (3) Federal agencies, especially the Work Projects Administration, to some extent the Farm Security Administration, and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, have carried on considerable rural social research, the purpose of which has been to analyze regional situations.
- (4) In a few instances, national commissions or boards have been made responsible for analyzing regional situations, and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics is now developing a number of additional regional or subregional research projects:
 - (a) The Interdepartmental Rio Grande Board is composed of representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of the Interior. It was set up to recommend policies and programs to be used in correlating activities of Federal agencies in this area and in obtaining the cooperation of other public agencies, corporations, and persons in making effective an approved long-term program of land use.
 - (b) The Interbureau Coordinating Committee on the Mississippi Delta Problem Area is a group of representatives of nine agencies or bureaus in the Department of Agriculture whose objective is to study the unguided settlement movement under way on new lands in the Mississippi Delta, and to develop recommendations for new policies of government pointing toward the guidance of this movement.
 - (c) The Interbureau Coordinating Committee on the Lake States Cut-over has members from nine agencies or bureaus in the Department of Agriculture and was created to develop a program of rehabilitation for the human and physical resources of that area.
 - (d) Joint Investigations of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project are being carried on by staff members of five agencies of the Department of Agriculture. This work was undertaken at the request of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation and involves the study of 28 separate problems in connection with the development of the Columbia Basin project. Both Washington and field members of the Department of Agriculture are working on the project in cooperation and consultation with the Bureau of Reclamation and numerous officials in the States involved.
 - (e) The Great Plains Agricultural Advisory Council is a committee composed of representatives of five States and the Department of Agriculture, who meet together to take inventory of research completed in that area, to decide what further research is needed and by what division of labor it can most effectively be conducted.

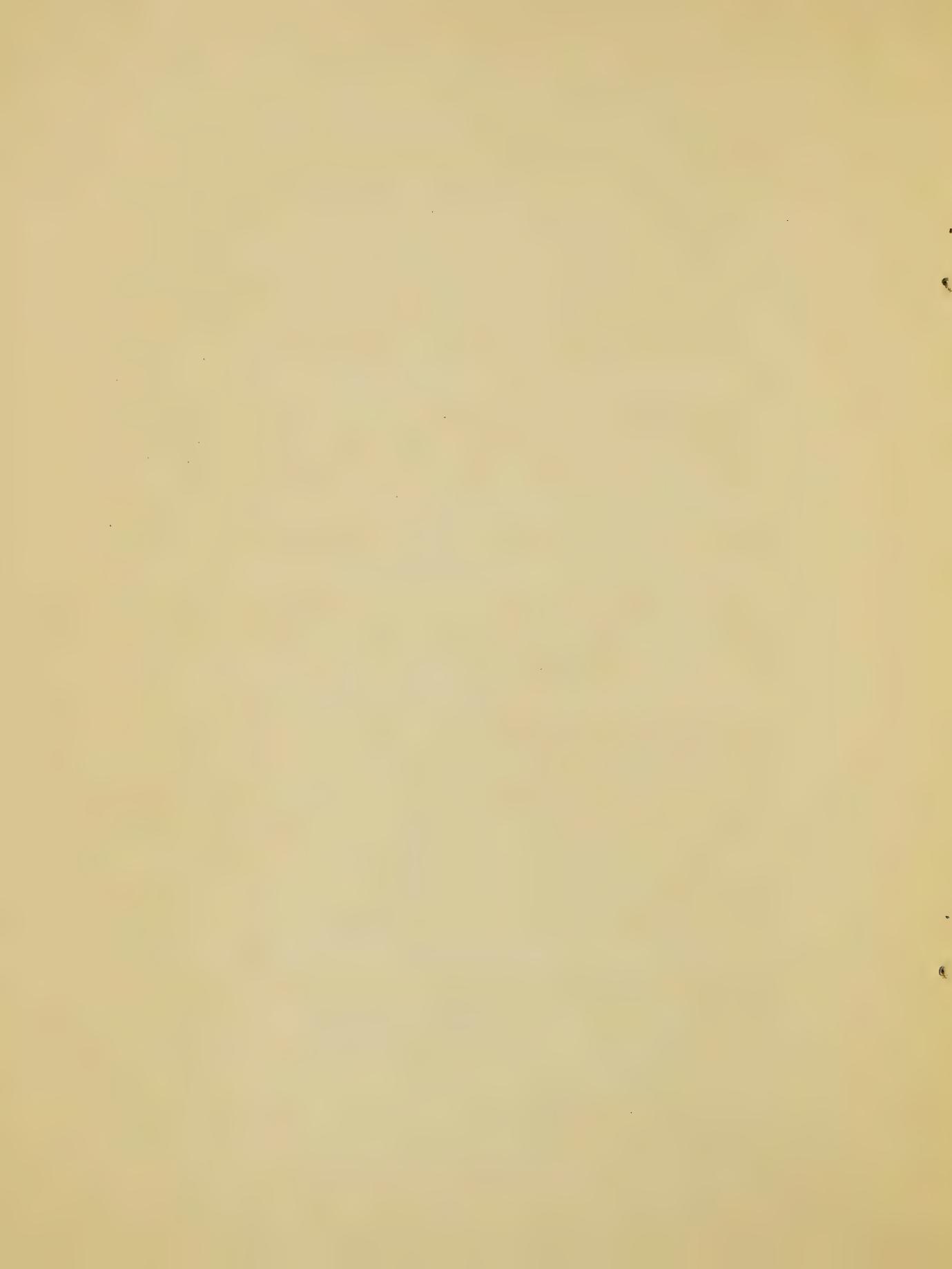


(f) The Interbureau Coordinating Committee on the Pecos Joint Investigation, representing five agencies or bureaus in the Department of Agriculture, is working in cooperation with the National Resources Committee to conduct an investigation covering the acquisition, organization, and analysis of factual data as the basis for river compact negotiations by the States of New Mexico and Texas. The best present and prospective water supply, consumption, and other uses of water; and factual information to make possible remedial measures for salinity, floods, reservoir, and channel siltation are under investigation.

(g) The Interbureau Coordinating Committee on the Mississippi Backwater Area Study, Yazoo Segment, represents eight agencies of the Department of Agriculture and has as its purpose the preparation of a report on land use in its relation to the lower Mississippi flood-control program.

(B) The work projected for the Northern Great Plains is a good example of a cooperative approach to interstate or regional problems.

- (1) The Northern Great Plains Agricultural Advisory Council has set up a research subcommittee composed of the Directors of the Experiment Stations of Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, together with a representative of the United States Department of Agriculture.
- (2) This committee "has undertaken as one of its activities, through the various research workers of the states and federal government, to list certain established principles which are generally accepted and to point out the research work most needed in different subject-matter fields." In its report of February, 1940, it says, "It is the opinion of the Research Committee that the report should be of value not only in coordinating the effort of the various agencies but in directing research along the lines of paramount interest to the people of the Northern Great Plains..... It is suggested that the research specialists study the report carefully, particularly the sections relating to their own fields."
- (3) In the field of Rural Sociology, after listing established principles and facts, the committee points out three fields of needed research:
 - (a) Population;
 - (b) Community organization;
 - (c) Standards of living.



- (4) If the next logical step is taken, the State, Federal, and other research agencies studying the problems of the Northern Great Plains will work out a division of labor between themselves and thus will accomplish the maximum fruitful use of their funds and personnel in a unified research program.

Cooperative Research in the South

There is no area of the Nation for which preliminary investigations have more thoroughly prepared the ground for cooperative interstate and regional research than the South. These preliminary steps need to be followed by a well-worked-out, coordinated program by the research agencies working in this region.

- (A) Odum's monumental work on Southern Regions, Vance's Human Geography of the South, and literally dozens of monographs or individual speeches and papers have delineated and partially analyzed the South, southern regions and subregions, and southern social problems.
- (1) These studies, however, are little more than pathfinders, many of them subject to revision and refinement.
- (2) They have been carried out by individuals or small groups, and even as preliminary steps need to be subjected to the criticism of the combined southern research group which should be mobilized for carrying out as nearly complete a social research analysis of the South as possible.
- (3) This combined research group should consist of the social scientists of all of the southern institutions of higher learning, federal agencies, and foundations.
- (B) Once such a southern research council is established as a working body, it should definitely move in the direction of working out a division of labor among all agencies to be engaged in the regional research project.
- (1) Each institution of higher learning could conduct and probably would be willing to conduct a line of research projects which would contribute to the regional analysis. At the same time these institutions could be studying the dominant problems in their own States, e.g.:
- (a) Population composition and trends;
- (b) Socio-ecological situations, that is, the relationship of population and social organization to natural resources and technological development;

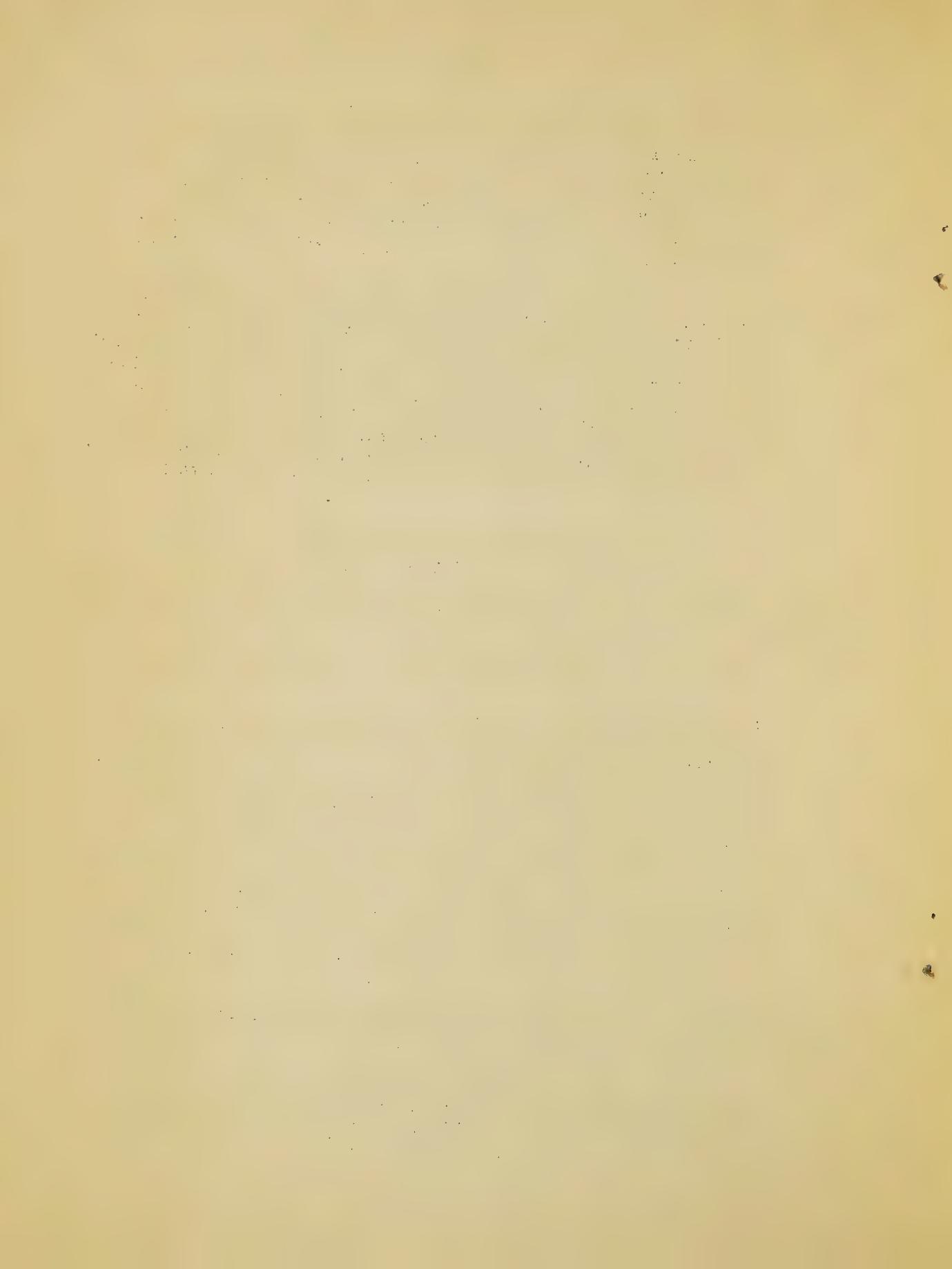
- (c) Standards of living;
 - (d) Urban-rural relationships;
 - (e) Institutional development;
 - (f) Such special problems as mechanization, rural youth, tenancy, etc.
- (2) Federal agencies and foundations could cooperate with personnel and financial aid in these State projects and could carry out those projects or segments of projects which require going across or beyond State boundaries or which for other reasons would be difficult projects to pursue with State funds, e.g.: certain population trends or movements, interstate and inter-regional competition factors, the impact of federal and other overhead action programs, etc.
- (C) It would be largely useless, however, to expect such a scheme of research organization to operate unless realistic consideration is given to the laws and procedures under which the various agencies must work, and unless institutional, State, and federal agencies and personnel are each given an opportunity to work creatively and with a considerable degree of self-direction. In such a cooperative undertaking, some of the things that would need to be guaranteed are as follows:
- (1) A democratically operated southern social science council of research would need to guide or sponsor the whole research program. On this council should be representatives:
 - (a) All of the institutions of higher learning within the States definitely planning to place personnel and funds in the program;
 - (b) The Bureau of Agricultural Economics or other federal agencies placing personnel and money into the program;
 - (c) Any foundations placing substantial funds and/or personnel into the program.
 - (2) Federal agencies would have to forego the tendency to dragoon local agencies into carrying out programs which, in competition with other alternatives, would not appeal to the local or State institutions.

- (3) State institutions and agencies would need to recognize that federal agencies and foundations had contributions other than money to make, and that they could not be dragooned into turning money over for projects which the State agencies might care to pursue but which, in competition with other alternatives, would not be acceptable to the federal agencies or the foundations.
- (4) It would need to be recognized that there would be a number of projects which a State, a federal agency, or a foundation might want to conduct and in which it would be impossible, for financial or other reasons, for State institutions to cooperate and vice versa; in such cases, there should not prevail the idea that the consent of those who could not participate was necessary before such projects could go forward. In other words, a "dog in the manger" attitude or sabotaging of projects on the assumption that either a federal or State agency has a geographic monopoly would have to be dispensed with.

Suggested Southern Regional Problems

Two of these suggestions represent subregional situations for which standard research approaches are recommended, and the other is a South-wide development which should be studied carefully.

- (A) The South-wide development is mechanization and should be studied on a regional basis.
 - (1) Mechanization has not yet entered southern agriculture to the extent that it is found in midwestern and western agriculture, but it will in due time come to the South. The South is due considerable urban and industrial development, much of which could be decentralized industry in relatively small towns. This region is our major tenant belt and one of our major land use adjustment areas. Programs in both of these fields are on the march. The farm labor problem will become more acute due to population pressure and mechanization. Because the South has far more than its share of the nation's children, its rural youth problem is pronounced. All these phases of the problem of mechanization are worthy of study.
- (B) I shall cite only two, but two very well-marked, relatively homogeneous subregional areas in the South which should be studied by the interstate and regional approach.
 - (1) The Southern Appalachian Highlands should be studied by the States of Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and probably by South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.



- (a) Here is an area of relatively poor natural resources, self-sufficing farming, and population pressure.
- (b) Some specific components of the analysis of this region should be:
 - (1) Population vital statistics
 - (2) Population migrations
 - (3) Social ecology - man and institutional natural resources ratios
 - (4) Institutional adjustments
 - (5) Handicrafts, domestic and decentralized industries
 - (6) Standards of living
 - (7) Attitudes
- (2) The Mississippi Delta should be studied by the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Missouri.
 - (a) Here is an area of the richest land in the Nation, with practically no self-sufficient agriculture, dense population but probably capable of sustaining even more population than is now there.
 - (b) Some of the components of the analysis should be:
 - (1) Population vital statistics
 - (2) Population migrations
 - (3) The relation of abundant natural resources to a low standard of living and the causes therefor.
 - (4) Opportunities for relocation and resettlement of additional people on Delta lands
 - (5) Farm tenancy
 - (6) Institutional arrangements and adjustments
 - (7) Standards of living
 - (8) Attitudes

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people are more or less ignorant of the

truths of the gospel.

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- (C) During the last two decades, there have been a good many of the same type of rural social research projects as described above, which have been carried on by one or more of these 12 States.
 - (1) Population studies have been made in nine of these States.
 - (2) Standard of living studies have been carried on in seven.
 - (3) Farm-tenancy studies have been made in seven of these twelve States.
 - (4) The relation of certain social problems to the natural resources has been studied in two or three.
 - (5) There are in progress at the present time about seventy-four projects in at least a dozen fields in these States, each of which could be so conducted as to make its findings of region-wide significance.
- (D) Apparently the first easy step to take in the direction of interstate or regional research is to mobilize and coordinate the research efforts now under way toward the objective of making the findings of rural social research available and meaningful on a wider than local basis.
 - (1) Much could be accomplished within the next twelve months by this procedure.
 - (2) Some basic problems have not as yet been attacked, however, and both personnel and funds are needed for attacking untouched problems and for more adequate support of a greater number of the types of projects already under way.

